

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

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4 April 1966

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HIGHLIGHTS

Vietnamese Marines have been flown to Da Nang, while Buddhist-inspired demonstrations continue in Saigon and major northern, highland, and coastal cities. On the military side, a number of large-scale allied operations are continuing with good results.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: In Operation LINCOLN, seven US Army battalions are continuing their major drive against regimental-strength Communist troop concentrations and base areas in southern Pleiku and northern Darlac provinces (Para. 1). Search-and-destroy/security Operation BUN KAE V by three ROK battalions in Binh Dinh Province continues to inflict heavy losses on Viet Cong forces near Qui Nhon (Paras. 2-3). ARVN reaction/pursuit Operation BU PRANG has been favorably terminated in Quang Duc Province (Para. 4). US Marines, supported by B-52 strikes, are continuing Operation ORANGE southwest of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province (Para. 5). B-52 Stratofortresses yesterday continued their saturation bombing attacks against Communist base areas just inside the Laotian border (Para. 6). ARVN Operation DAN CHI 215 continues according to plan in the delta province of Phong Dinh (Para. 7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Vietnamese Marines have been flown to Da Nang where the mayor, Dr. Man, proclaims his fate is up to the "people" (Paras. 1-2). Demonstrations, some orderly, some rebellious, continued in Saigon and major northern, highland, and coastal cities (Paras. 3-6). Viet Cong infiltration into the struggle groups is widely reported but still unconfirmed (Para. 7).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: MACV has completed a study of PAVN prisoners captured in 1965 which shows that the average length of military training among them is rather low; the study also tends to confirm that the draft age in

the DRV has been considerably expanded (Paras. 1-2). US military authorities in Saigon have confirmed the infiltration of a tenth North Vietnamese regiment into South Vietnam. This brings the total confirmed DRV troop strength in the South to over 18,000 (Paras. 3-4).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

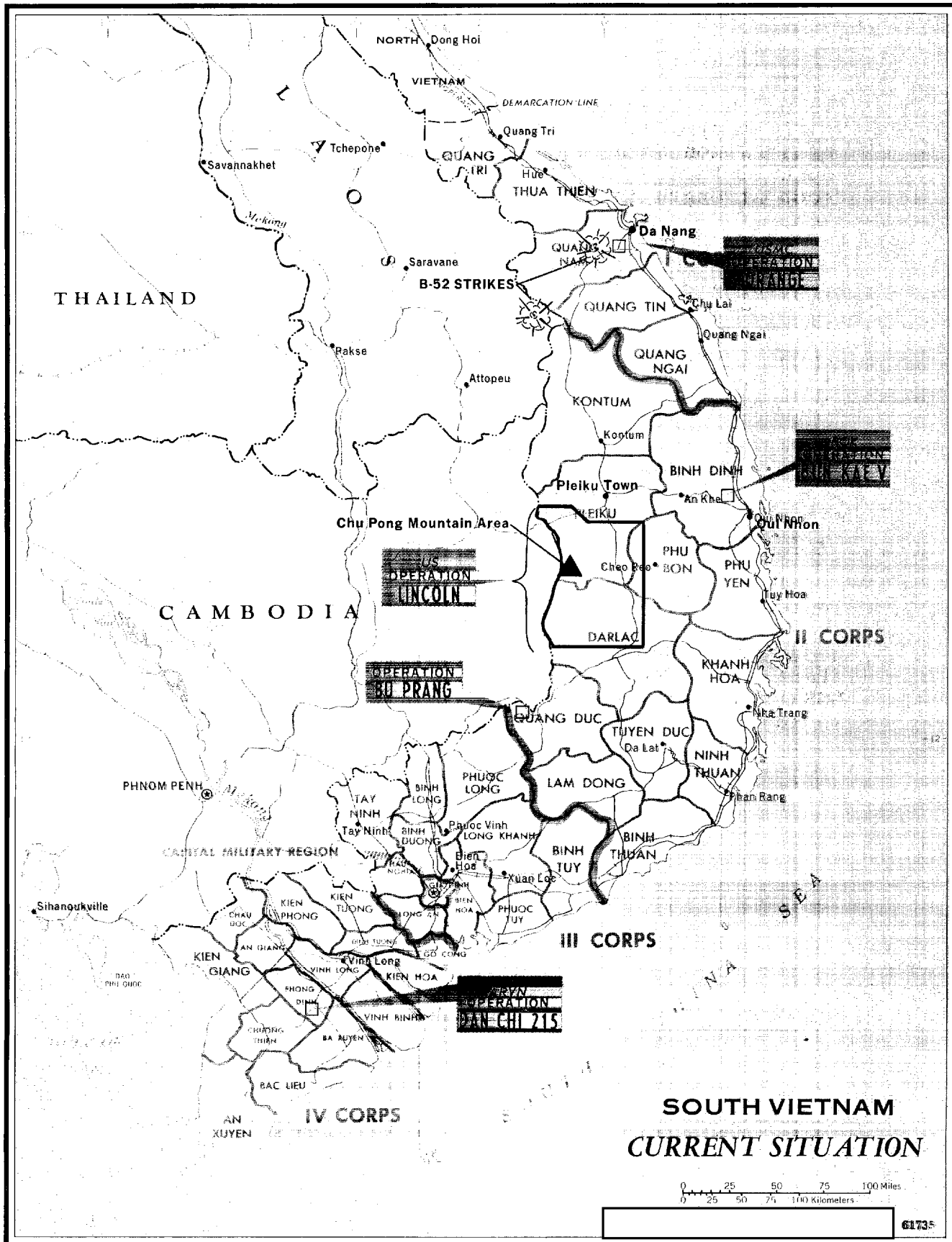
V. Communist Political Developments: The Vietnamese Communists are continuing to applaud Soviet assistance to the Vietnamese war effort, while implying that the level of activity in the war will be such that increased Soviet aid will be necessary (Para. 1). The latest Soviet pronouncement on volunteers for the Vietnam war seems to be mainly a propaganda play and does not indicate that Soviet military personnel will begin taking a large, direct role in the Vietnam combat (Paras. 2-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Five battalions of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division and two battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division are continuing to press their major offensive--Operation LINCOLN--against regimental-strength Viet Cong/PAVN forces in southern Pleiku and northern Darlac provinces. Action currently centers in the Chu Pong Mountain area some 40 miles southwest of Pleiku city along the Cambodian border. Light to heavy contact was reported in this area during the weekend, including hostile fire from enemy positions on or very close to the Cambodian border. In response, 1st Cavalry units were ordered to destroy enemy border positions by mortar fire alone, and, contrary to press reports, MACV states that no cross-border US troop maneuvers occurred. Communist losses to date in the 12-day ground sweep stand at 316 killed (US body count) and 71 weapons captured, as against US casualties of 33 killed, 88 wounded, and five missing.

2. Search-and-destroy/security Operation BUN KAE V by three ROK battalions 17 miles northwest of Qui Nhon, the capital of central coastal Binh Dinh Province, entered its fourth day today with frequent sharp contact reported with Viet Cong forces. The operation, whose objective is to provide security for the construction of a new airfield in the South Korean Capital Division's tactical area of responsibility has thus far resulted in cumulative enemy losses of 180 killed (ROK body count), 29 captured, 42 suspects apprehended, and 21 weapons seized. ROK casualties presently total 19 killed and 41 wounded.

3. On 3 April, two US armed helicopters providing tactical air support to ROK Operation BUN KAE V fired into a friendly hamlet near Qui Nhon, killing 14 Vietnamese and wounding 24. The wounded have been evacuated to a Qui Nhon civilian hospital and MACV medical personnel have been dispatched to the scene to assist. The cause of the incident is under investigation.

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4. Operation BU PRANG, an ARVN two-battalion reaction/pursuit ground sweep initiated on 23 March in response to a Viet Cong attack against Bu Prang outpost in Quang Duc Province, was terminated on 2 April with impressive results. Communist losses were placed at 212 killed (90 confirmed by US body count), three captured, and 22 automatic weapons and assault rifles seized, in contrast to government casualties of five killed and 17 wounded.

5. Sharp but sporadic Viet Cong resistance continues to be encountered by reinforced battalion-strength USMC task force elements conducting Operation ORANGE southwest of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province. Since its initiation on 1 April, ORANGE has resulted in 37 Communist troops killed and two captured, as against US Marine losses of 12 killed, 67 wounded, and one missing. Late yesterday, in direct support of Operation ORANGE, three USAF B-52 Stratofortresses mounted a harassment/spoiling attack against a heavily traveled Viet Cong infiltration route 15 nautical miles southwest of Da Nang.

6. In a separate saturation bombing mission, nine additional B-52s yesterday attacked a suspected Communist ammunition depot/base camp/rice storage facility approximately 80 miles southwest of Da Nang and three miles inside Laos. No ground follow-up operations were planned.

7. South Vietnamese infantry, ranger, and river assault group forces are continuing the six-battalion search-and-destroy Operation DAN CHI 215 in the delta province of Phong Dinh. Thus far, an estimated 83 Viet Cong have been killed, three captured, and 48 weapons seized, in contrast to government losses of seven wounded.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Ky government has moved the 2nd and 3rd Vietnamese Marine battalions to Da Nang--its first major military reaction to restore order in the wake of continued Buddhist-inspired defiance of the military government. The first of six C-130 Hercules aircraft, piloted by the US Air Force, arrived in Da Nang at 10:00 p.m. Saigon time tonight (9:00 a.m. EST) and will be followed tomorrow by Vietnamese Air Force planes carrying the 1st Marine Battalion. There are no US advisers with the airlifted units. ARVN units from III and IV Corps have been ordered to Saigon in the absence of the marine battalions.

2. In Da Nang, Mayor Man answered Ky's charge that the city was in the hands of the Communists by saying that this judgment was incorrect and that his status was up to the "people." Da Nang was in a state of temporary calm by early evening, partly because the radio was deactivated by the director and his technical staff, who fled the city. There are reports that roadblocks have been set up to interfere with the movement of marine troops coming from the airport.

3. In Nha Trang, the potentially explosive confrontation between Buddhist and Catholic students subsided after martial law was proclaimed and a few students and bicyclodrivers were arrested. Although the radio was guarded by military forces, the Vietnamese Information Service was in the hands of the demonstrators.

4. Embassy officials fear that the demonstrators might get out of hand in Dalat, where considerable damage has already been done to the radio station and an adjoining hotel. The city is off limits to all US forces, and US dependents have been evacuated.

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5. In Saigon, police seem to be in control of potential trouble spots and acted firmly today in dispersing demonstrators with tear gas. No injuries have been reported, but a US jeep was burned when it got in the path of a small group of demonstrators. A student demonstration is planned for tomorrow, following an early meeting of a Saigon University student committee and the Youth and Student Council for Protection of the People, whose vice president was arrested on 2 April.

6. Student demonstrators in Hue presented a petition to a US Consulate officer which claimed that the US has exceeded its role as an ally in the war against the Communists by interfering in the domestic affairs of the Republic of Vietnam. The US Embassy reported that the declaration was given to the press an hour before it was presented to the consulate.

7. There are continuing reports of efforts by Viet Cong "municipal committees" in Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and other northern towns to infiltrate the "struggle groups" and exploit the current unrest with antigovernment and anti-American propaganda. Although the organization, techniques, and substantive points of contention of the struggle campaign bear strong resemblance to those of the Communists, there is still no firm evidence that militant Buddhist leaders such as Tri Quang are under Communist influence. At least one member of the ruling Directorate, Secretary General Chieu, feels there is some "invisible Communist involvement" in the struggle leadership, according to the US Embassy political counselor who talked with Chieu.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. A recent MACV study of 125 North Vietnamese soldiers captured in 1965 provides some interesting insights into North Vietnamese manpower problems. Only 13 of the 125 men were voluntary enlistees in the North Vietnamese Army; the rest were all drafted. Over half had less than one year of military experience before their infiltration, and a third had been in the army less than six months. Many of the prisoners reported that they felt that their training was inadequate. For example, one battalion was composed entirely of draftees who had had only two months' training. Other prisoners reported training periods of from 17 days to five weeks, while two prisoners said they had received no training at all prior to infiltration. The study also tended to confirm the fact that North Vietnam has been forced to expand the draft age from 18-to-26 to 13-to-30.

2. MACV comments, however, that there was no apparent lowering of selection and training standards for cadre personnel, who form the leadership of the infiltrating units. They apparently remain dedicated and effective leaders, and may account, in part, for the relatively good showing made by PAVN units in the South. Almost all of the captured leadership cadre, including a large number recalled into the army from civilian life, were products of the excellent leadership training schools in North Vietnam. Many battalion-level cadre sent South are combat veterans of the French-Indochinese conflict.

New PAVN Units

3. MACV has confirmed the presence of another North Vietnamese Army unit--the 95th "B" Regiment--in South Vietnam. This regiment, the tenth confirmed to date, has a strength of 2,000 and consists of three battalions. The unit was activated in March 1965 and began its infiltration to South Vietnam in December of last year.

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[redacted] The regiment participated in the attack on the A Shau Special Forces camp in early March, and is now accepted in Thua Thien Province.

4. North Vietnamese troop strength in South Vietnam is now confirmed at 18,630 in ten regiments and four separate battalions. Over-all Viet Cong/North Vietnamese main force troop strength (confirmed, probable, and possible) is now 79,490.

5. There are also indications both in recently captured documents and in reports from prisoners that a number of North Vietnamese units that have not yet been listed even in the possible category by MACV have infiltrated South Vietnam in the last few months. For example, seven Viet Cong captives taken recently in Pleiku Province have reported the presence of three new North Vietnamese regiments--the 18th "B," and the 6th and the 141st regiments of the 312th Division. These three units are reported to be in the Pleiku area along with three confirmed PAVN units--the 32nd, 33rd, and 66th regiments. MACV comments, however, that one or more of the new regiments are probably replacements for the three confirmed units, which sustained over 2,000 casualties in late 1965.

Drones Shot Down

6. Two US reconnaissance drones were lost over North Vietnam on 4 April--one because of an inflight malfunction and the other to SAMs. This is the 13th drone downed by North Vietnamese SAMs. Since the drone program began in 1964, approximately 120 missions have been flown [redacted] Fifty-five of these pilotless aircraft have been lost--28 to hostile action and the others for various reasons such as mechanical failure. The drone vehicle, which flies at approximately 60,000 feet, is particularly vulnerable to SAM defenses, presenting an easy target that rarely alters course, speed, or altitude. It also presents a good target for MIG-19 and -21 fighters. While losses have been high, the drone reconnaissance program has been one of the major intelligence sources on DRV military developments.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Vietnamese Communists are continuing to make statements lauding Soviet aid to the Vietnam war effort, while at the same time implying that the course of the war will result in the necessity of even greater Soviet assistance. The latest statement along these lines came in the form of a message of greeting from the National Liberation Front to the Soviet 23rd Party Congress. The Front's president, Nguyen Huu Tho, expressed "deep gratitude" for Moscow's support and assistance to the Viet Cong, while citing the US buildup in South Vietnam to justify a continuation and an increase in this assistance. In turn, Tho pledged the Front to fight against the "American aggressors" until final victory. Tho also expressed gratitude for Chinese assistance, in another indication that the Vietnamese hope to stay mainly in the middle between Peking and Moscow, encouraging assistance from both sides as the occasion warrants.

Soviet Volunteers

2. General Alexei Yepishev, political chief of the Soviet armed forces, in his 4 April remarks at the Soviet party congress, asserted that thousands of Russians, including "the personnel of whole military units," had volunteered to fight for the freedom of the Vietnamese people. Occasionally, during the past year, various Soviet officials and propaganda organs have made references to alleged Soviet volunteers for the Vietnam war. They were most recently heard in routine Radio Moscow broadcasts and a TASS report during "Vietnam Solidarity Week" from 12-19 March.

3. Moscow appears to be primarily interested in the propaganda value of such statements as well as their utility in substantiating the USSR's "revolutionary character" in the face of China's charges of "capitulation" to US interests. The first reference to volunteers was made by Soviet party leader

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Brezhnev on 23 March 1965 during a hard-hitting speech against US policies in Vietnam. It is interesting to note that he made this speech just after the close of the "consultative meeting" of Communist parties that came under severe attack from the Chinese.

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